

Indian Orchard Community Development Corporation

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115 Dubois Street
Indian Orchard, MA. 01151

February 3, 2012

Community Development Department
City of Springfield
36 Court Street
Springfield, MA. 01103

Re: Community Development Programs
for FY 2012-2013

Dear Sirs;

We would like to first express our appreciation for this opportunity to comment on the City's use of CDBG and other Federal funds.

That being said we would like to suggest that to best use these resources, including those coming into the City as a result of the tornado last year, significant changes should be made from the ways funds have been used in recent years.

First, radical changes should be made in the "Citizen participation" program so that it both promotes full participation by all citizens, including members of minority groups, and does not manipulate and bias the participation that takes place by having the management and support of that participation under the control of the CD Department. The CD Dept. often has a vested interest in the outcome of citizen oversight processes and this creates a conflict of interest. Also, citizen participation, to be sustainable and not to 'burn out' citizens, should be redefined to include citizen involvement in carrying out development and human service programs, not just commenting passively on what others are doing or should do.

We would note that these were among the goals when Indian Orchard CDC was formed in the 1990s, both involving minority residents and actually getting things done for the community,

and in both areas we have been consistently shut out. Not only has our work been unrecognized and unsupported, but when we did develop a strategy to renovate the landmark building at Parker and Main Streets to improve the area, it seemed to those involved that the Citizens Council and the City engaged in a coordinated effort to block progress on the project, and they have in fact combined to demolish the building using City funds, and now plans are being made to obliterate the site. This is not the way citizen's efforts should be supported.

We would instead suggest that citizen councils and civic associations be elected by all the voters during general elections, instead of by just a few voters, and that other funds be found for their support not involving the CD Department. This would make them more representative and also eliminate the serious conflict of interest that exists due to direct funding by the agency that they are supposed to oversee.

Second, we would suggest that due to the many vacant houses and homes needing repairs, that instead of using City, State, and Federal money finding fault with properties and property owners, and promoting more vacant housing by aggressive code enforcement, that these funds should be transferred to the Springfield Redevelopment Authority or some other agency to finance a revived housing rehabilitation program. With the mortgage market inaccessible to many people this would meet a crucial need.

Third, we would suggest that City support should be provided for CDCs and similar organizations in various parts of the City, as is done in Boston and in other cities, to match other available funds, and to allow CDCs as community-based groups to carry out development and social service programs instead of supporting outside people and groups to come into our communities. These kinds of things send the wrong message to young people, and to all people. We should be supporting our own people, helping our people build capacity to accomplish valuable tasks, not supporting people from the suburbs or from Chelsea or Boston to provide services to us with our own money.

Sincerely,

Miguel Soto
President

Page 3 IOCDC to the City of Springfield – 2/3/2012

Cc: City Council
 IOCDC Board
 Other CDCs, Councils, and Civic Associations
 file